

Printing NEWS

Lessons From tCreative

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Last month, I told a tale of ethics and profitability—how doing the right thing can be great for business. I outlined the business philosophy of one print and marketing company, tCreative, and how its “do the right thing” approach has helped it grow from its birth on the lanai of Tim Holcomb’s Florida home to its present home in Winter Park, FL, in a comfy seven-thousand-square-foot building with nearly a dozen employees.

During the interview with Holcomb, I wanted to know his experience with his creative and marketing customers, whether there were key “takeaway” points he wanted creatives to know about working successfully with print / marketing companies like his, and if so, what they were. Here is what Holcomb—with input from the rest of his team—had to say:

1. Seek to understand the print process so you know what it can do for you.

This first takeaway falls in line with tCreative being a Seven Habits company (one of these habits being “seek to understand, then be understood”), even if not intentionally. Holcomb’s point was that, as we’ve discussed many times in this column, when designers and marketers seek to understand the printing process, this puts them in the driver’s seat to accomplish far more than if they focus on the design alone. If you’re working with a printer who treats printing and file prep information as proprietary, then find a new printer.

2. Work backwards from the end result.

If you work backwards from your final destination, you can often optimize the project in a way that cannot be done “front end first.” Whether it’s anticipating challenging binding issues or optimizing for database-driven design, let the goals of your project determine how the job is put together.

A great example of both points is “green” printing. If tCreative knows about the client’s goals up front, its team can use its knowledge of the printing process to make the project even greener than the client could have imagined. It does this by backing in, with the end goal in mind. This can also help the client to save on cost.

For example, based on the print run, tCreative knows which press will be used to print the job. Each press has a different format, and by starting with this format in mind, team members can help the client select an optimum output size, stock, and ink to reduce waste and minimize cost. Of course, recycled content and environmentally friendly inks should be considered at the front end, as well.

But it’s “green” issues related to stock size and press format that are most unfamiliar to designers. For example, based on the size of the postcard desired, tCreative (or whoever your printer might be) can efficiently utilize

the parent sheet—usually 23x35” or 26x40”—to get the maximum “outs” and minimize the amount of leftover scrap. This is a big plus for restaurants and other clients for whom high volumes and odd-sized print output (such as menus) can create enormous volumes of waste.

“When we find out that, over the course of a year, we’ll be producing 250,000 menus, we can often make seemingly minor changes that have a huge pay-off,” Holcomb says. “For example, the designer may want to create a 17x21” menu because it looks cool, but I can explain that, if he redesigns it as 16x19 ¾” or 17x20”, he can get four more out of a parent sheet. Over the course of a year, that will save the client \$8,000 in 50,000 parent sheets and he comes out looking like the hero.”

As clients go green, they may also want to start thinking about cost differently. Most think cost per piece, but that may not be the most environmentally friendly way to look at it.

Re-Evaluating Cost

When most designers are creating a 5,000 piece mailing, for example, they choose 3x5” to get the least expensive per-piece rate. Cost might be around \$.36 per postcard, including postage. But the average return for direct mail is around 1.0%. That means you’ll get around 50 mailers on those 5,000 sent. That’s \$36.00 per response (based on \$1,800 print and mail cost). But if they carefully qualify your mailing list or purchase a qualified list and send to only 3,500 prospects at a cost of \$1.36 per card, they might spend more per piece but get a 12% return or 420 responses. Now the cost per lead just dropped to \$11 (based on \$4,760 print and mail cost). Plus, they sent out 1,500 fewer mailers, translating into fewer trees and less fossil fuels burned to produce and distribute the job. Not to mention the lower number of pieces thrown in the trash.

Is it worth an extra \$3,000 to generate an extra 370 responses, reduce the cost per lead, and reduce your environmental footprint at the same time? It’s all in how you look at it.

3. Don’t be proprietary—let your print/marketing company help you.

The final takeaway is not to be rigid about your approach. As you can see from the examples above, it’s worth your while to be flexible and hear your print partner out. You might find that there are options you hadn’t thought about that have a positive impact on the results.

Also consider sharing your results back with your print provider. This way, its marketing experts can work with you to tweak the next campaign and achieve even better results next time.

MEDIA COVERAGE

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